

VZCZCXRO0690
RR RUEHDE RUEHDIR
DE RUEHMS #0810/01 2391041
ZNY CCCCC ZZH
R 271041Z AUG 07
FM AMEMBASSY MUSCAT
TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC 8650
INFO RUEHZM/GULF COOPERATION COUNCIL COLLECTIVE
RUEHLM/AMEMBASSY COLOMBO 0053
RUEHBUL/AMEMBASSY KABUL 0047
RUEHC/DEPT OF LABOR WASHDC
RHEHNSC/NSC WASHDC

C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 MUSCAT 000810

SIPDIS

SIPDIS

E.O. 12958: DECL: 08/26/2017

TAGS: [PREL](#) [PGOV](#) [PHUM](#) [SMIG](#) [ELAB](#) [IR](#) [MU](#)

SUBJECT: IRAN TRANSIT POINT FOR ILLEGAL IMMIGRATION TO OMAN

REF: A. MUSCAT 324

[1](#)B. 06 MUSCAT 1004

[1](#)C. MUSCAT 651

Classified By: Ambassador Gary A. Grappo, reasons 1.4 b/d.

[1](#)1. (C) Summary: Thousands of illegal immigrants, primarily from Pakistan and Afghanistan, enter Oman by boat across the Gulf of Oman from Iran every year. Contacts in the Royal Oman Police (ROP) Coast Guard accuse elements of the Iranian Republican Guard (IRGC) of facilitating the flow of illegal immigrants. Oman's Coast Guard has stepped up its efforts to stop the illegal immigration through more aggressive patrolling, but officials admit that they likely capture and deport only a small percentage of those that annually make the crossing. End summary.

Size and Nature of the Problem

[1](#)2. (C) Iran serves as a transfer point on a route for thousands of illegal immigrants from throughout South Asia who cross the Gulf of Oman in Iranian-owned and operated boats primarily to access the labor markets of Oman and other Gulf states, official Omani contacts assert. Lt. Colonel Badar Khalfan al-Zadjali, Assistant Commanding Officer of the ROP Coast Guard, told Emboffs that in both 2005 and 2006, the Coast Guard captured and deported an average of 10,000 illegal immigrants attempting to enter Oman along its 480-kilometer Batinah Coast via Iran's Gulf ports. He indicated that the Coast Guard is on pace to capture and deport a similar number in 2007. He further estimated that the number captured could represent as little as one fifth of the total number that avoid capture and enter Oman successfully every year.

[1](#)3. (C) The majority of those entering Oman along this route are from Pakistan, Afghanistan and Iran. Contacts state, however, that the route via Iran and across the Gulf of Oman is well-known throughout South Asia, and that people from as far away as Bangladesh use it. (Note: Most of the immigrants transit Oman for other destinations throughout the Gulf, often crossing Oman's land border with the United Arab Emirates through al Buraimi (ref A). End note.) Diplomats at the Embassy of Bangladesh in Muscat confirmed that its nationals have entered Oman along this route after making an arduous journey by land through India and Pakistan.

Allegations of Iranian Involvement

[1](#)4. (C) Zadjali showed Emboffs a series of photographs, which he claimed were provided by British intelligence, of a

staging ground for illegal immigrants just north of the Iranian port town of Jask, located at the entrance to the Strait of Hormuz. Zadjali also had several pictures of small boats, which he said have a maximum capacity of roughly 25 passengers, lined up along a cement quay at the port. He claimed the boats were preparing to pick up and transport "immigrants to Oman." He continued that although in most cases Iranian boat operators transport immigrants to Oman before returning to Iran, some immigrants appear to pilot their own boats, which they purchase in Iran and leave deserted on isolated stretches of Omani beaches.

15. (C) Zadjali stated forcefully that elements of Iran's security services, specifically the IRGC, are complicit in allowing the flow of illegal immigrants through Iran, saying that this was "more than a personal feeling, but a known fact" within the ROP. He opined that it was inconceivable to believe that such large numbers of people would be able to transit Iran or that boats crossing the Gulf would be allowed to operate from Iranian ports without at least the IRGC's tacit approval. Zadjali claimed that Omani officials have repeatedly raised this issue with their Iranian counterparts during recent high-level visits, but that the Iranians denied any involvement by its security services. The flow of illegal immigration presents a security risk, Zadjali said, for although most of those captured are economic migrants, the Coast Guard also has apprehended a Russian national and several Iranian "criminals," which raises concerns about others who might have slipped through the porous border.

16. (C) Sayyed Muhammed Kailani, Charge of the Embassy of Afghanistan in Oman, stated that while he also has seen information from Afghan sources that the IRGC is involved in facilitating illegal immigration through Iran, he has no

MUSCAT 00000810 002 OF 002

definitive proof. He added that the Afghans awaiting repatriation in the ROP's deportation center in the coastal city of Sohar (ref B) often are unwilling to provide details of their crossing, even to members of their own diplomatic mission. Most of them likely intend to try the crossing again, he surmised, and do not want to jeopardize their connections, which makes it exceedingly difficult to get good information. Kailani did say, however, that some of the Afghans- who include nationals as well as ethnic Afghans from Pakistan and the Azarah region of Iran- have told his staff that members of the Baluchi communities in Afghanistan, Iran, and Pakistan often coordinate various stages of their journey to Oman.

- - - - -
Omani Efforts to Stop the Flow
- - - - -

17. (C) Zadjali claimed that the Coast Guard is doing what it can to stem the flow of illegal immigrants into Oman. The Coast Guard has started more aggressive patrolling along the Omani coast, and the ROP has instituted stiffer penalties for those caught transporting illegal immigrants into Omani territory. Boat operators face one to two years in prisons if caught, as well as the loss of their boat. There presently are 50 Iranian boat operators in prison in Oman, Zadjali claimed. He further informed Embodys that the Coast Guard recently shot at one boat carrying illegal immigrants after it refused an order to stop, killing two passengers and the Iranian boat operator. Although apparently saddened by the loss of life, he hoped that the aggressive tactics would send a message.

18. (C) Zadjali further added that Coast Guard statistics from 2004-2006 show a sizable jump in the number of immigrants apprehended during the months of September and October, which have corresponded in those years with the observance of Ramadan. The number of illegal immigrants captured during those months totaled more than 2,500, he said, representing often as much as a five-fold increase over the number

captured during the months before and after this period. Oman is preparing an aggressive campaign in 2007 to counter the expected Ramadan surge, involving the Royal Navy, Royal Air Force and ROP Coast Guard in establishing a surveillance and interdiction web stretching along the Batinah coast and approximately 100 miles into the Gulf of Oman.

19. (C) Comment: The flow of illegal immigrants from South Asia through Iran is an increasing concern for the Omanis. Illegal immigration via this route is a source of instability in the labor market, as it introduces hundreds of low-skilled workers into Oman's black market for labor (ref C). The illegal immigrant population likely includes victims of trafficking in persons (TIP), although the ROP does not screen for victims in its deportation centers. As the Coast Guard official stated, the flow of illegal immigrants into Oman from Iran also presents a security problem. Finally, detaining and deporting illegal immigrants is expensive. In the case of Afghanistan, Oman bears all the costs associated with repatriation. Official Omanis were quick to lay the blame on Iran, and generally showed a lack of trust in Iranian intentions. Ultimately, both Omani officials and those from source country embassies believed that there was very little they could do to stop the flow of illegal immigrants across the Gulf of Oman without cooperation from Iran.
GRAPPO